



Dr David Meredith - Teagasc, Ireland

Date: 4th March, 2021

Time: 13:00-14:00

Where: Zoom - <https://ucd-ie.zoom.us/j/61261225697>

Abstract

The concept of shrinkage was originally deployed to describe sets of processes shaping declining urban areas and associated policy responses. The concept is beginning to emerge within the rural and regional studies literature, particularly within the EU. This paper briefly considers the background to the concept and its application to rural areas and questions whether it is a useful concept for rural policy stakeholders or merely represents the latest attempt to reframe the issue of rural population decline. The results of 12 semi-structured interviews and two focus groups undertaken with members of the EU Commission working within DG Agri and DG Regio are reported. Guided by a literature review, key themes are assessed, including geography of population decline, processes of decline, policy and governance. Analysis of these data establishes that interviewees discuss rural population decline with reference to complex intersections between historic and contemporary processes of social, demographic and economic change. In doing so, they are reflecting an understanding of change that goes beyond population decline and engages with the place-based nature of the drivers that underpin national or subnational processes of rural population change. This understanding is reflected in their assessment of the policy options for rural regions experienced or facing shrinkage and the associated need for development of capacity development and empowerment of stakeholders at, particularly, sub-national levels.